

Schenck-Crooke House,
New York City.

HABS No. 4-12

Brooklyn, Kings Co.

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9-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 4.
Southern New York State

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

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SCHENCK-CROOKE HOUSE
21-33 East Sixty-third Street
Brooklyn, Kings County, New York

Owner: Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific Company.

Date of Erection: 1656.

Architect: No record.

Builder: Capt. Schenck.

Present Condition: Good.

Number of Stories: One and a half.

Materials of Construction: Wood.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

THE SCHENCK-CROOKE HOMESTEAD
Bergen Beach (formerly Mill Island),
Long Island, New York City.

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Location, Date, History and Authorities

This old homestead, built in 1656, is reputed to be the oldest house in New York State. In 1956 (twenty-two years from now) it will be 300 years old. Located originally on Mill Island, which is now Bergen Beach, Long Island, its story of early exploration and international commerce is an intriguing revelation.

This story begins with one Jan Martense Schenck Van Nydeck, of noble lineage, who was born in Amersfoort, Holland, emigrated to New Netherland, and in 1653 built this house. His family line has been traced back without a break to the fourteenth century. They were Lords of Afferden. General Peter Schenck Van Nydeck was born at Gosh in 1547. His son Martin, born in 1584, was the father of the above mentioned founder of the family in America, whose name in Modern English was Captain John Schenck.

Years before Jamaica Bay was even dreamed of as a terminal for ocean liners, Capt. Schenck built Schenck Wharf on the end of Mill Island, and personally commanded the trading vessels which carried much of the imports and exports between Holland and the New World. This enterprising traffic offered a fine chance for imaginative fiction invented by some of the oldest inhabitants of former years in Flatlands and Bergen Beach. It was said that Schenck was a lieutenant of that much maligned citizen of New York, Captain Kidd. Somebody called the house "the pirate house". But no member of the Schenck family, so far as discovered, ever left a record of that crime against the law of nations which governs the high seas. No tale of buried treasure has



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ever been connected with Mill Island, and the movements of Captain Kidd when he came home after his alleged piratical expedition are fully recorded in the

N.Y. Colonial Documents

He did not touch that part of our coast.

Other episodes, of known historical verity, are associated with the property in its story through these many years. When Captain Schenck owned the property, it consisted of about 75 acres of woodland, upland, and salt marsh. His heirs sold the estate to Joris Martense, of Flatbush, for 2,500. This new owner was master of the property when the Revolutionary War broke out, and, while outwardly unswerving in his loyalty to King George the Third, he contributed liberally to the Patriot cause, -- in all about \$5,500. In this house, Capt. William Marrener, when he made his famous midnight expedition through Flatbush, captured Major Moncrief of the British army.

From the Martense family the property passed into the possession of Gen. Philip S. Crooke, and after diverse vicissitudes of ownership was finally bought, and is still owned, by The Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific Company.

The foregoing facts, except the movements of Captain Kidd, have been gathered through the researches of Charles A.

Ditmas, author of Historic Homesteads of Kings County; those conducted under the direction of Mr. Perry Walton, of Boston, author of Historic Buildings Now Standing in New York which were Erected prior to Eighteen Hundred, issued by the Bank of the Manhattan Company (1914), and of Rambles about Historic



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Brooklyn, issued by the Brooklyn Trust Co. (1916); and, more recently, those of Harold D. Eberlein, author of Manor Houses and Historic Homes of Long Island and Staten Island (1928). These writers have drawn upon such works as the Ostrander and Stiles histories of Brooklyn; Bergen's Early Settlers in Kings County; and the Strong and Treadwell histories of Flatbush and Flatlands. These in turn have cited original title-deeds, genealogies, biographies, and the publications of the Long Island Historical Society.

Description

A Flatbush Avenue car brings the antiquary or architect to the old Schenck-Crooke homestead. The house has changed little during the 288 years of its existence. It is typically Dutch in every way, and, as Eberlein says, shows all the characteristics common to the Dutch architecture of the Hudson Valley, the western part of Long Island, and northern New Jersey. "In addition to the thoroughly Batavian outward aspect," he adds, "it is interesting to note that tradition says the building was framed by a ship's carpenter." An examination of the interior tends to confirm that allegation. The framing of the timbers resembles that of ship construction.

The massive fireplace still stands in the living-room, and the old beams, presumably taken from the hull of a ship wrecked on the coast about the middle of the seventeenth century, are well preserved. Other interesting details appear in the drawings.

The creek that formerly separated the house from the mainland was filled in many years ago. A picture of the house in 1918 shows ivy-clad walls, and trees which shaded the long low porch.

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From the porch may be seen an odd looking mill, known as Gerritson's Mill. For two centuries it has rested on the shore of the Stroe Kil, variously called Gerritson's Creek or the Mill Pond. In the Revolution, it is said, the thrifty Dutch patriots sold flour to British soldiers passing that way who were willing to pay the price demanded in those days of scarcity -- one dollar a pound.

The little stream still flows quietly past by the old mill, and not far away are the golf links of the late Harry Payne Whitney.

Written, May 3, 1934 by

Thomas W. Hotchkiss

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Approved: *Wm. Dwyer Foster*



Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.